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Suit Asks Halt to DDT Discharge Into Ocean

Chemical Carried Through Sewer Lines,
Then to Sea, Environment Group Asserts

BY GENE BLAKE

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Suit to halt discharge of DDT wastes by a Torrance chemical company into sewers which empty into the ocean was filed in federal court here Thursday by the Environmental Defense Fund.

Named defendants were Montrose Chemical Corp., the world's largest DDT producer, and the County Sanitation District, which operates the trunk sewage disposal system. Injunctions were asked for both.

The suit charged that discharge of effluent high in DDT concentrations by the Montrose plant at 20201 S. Normandie Ave., Torrance, violates both federal and state law and the U.S. Constitution.

The effluent eventually is processed at the White Point sewage treatment plant and then discharged into the ocean. Weekly average discharge has been the equivalent of at least 100 pounds of DDT, according to the suit.

The DDT is hazardous to fish, birds and eventually to human health, the suit charged. Several species of birds, particularly the brown pelican, are threatened with extinction, it said.

DDT discharged into the sewer system is difficult to measure and trace, sanitation officials have said.

However, they reported that last April about 75% of the DDT emptying from sewers near Santa Monica Bay came from the Montrose Chemical Corp.

A federal study the following month showed fish in that bay had the highest DDT component content of any fish tested on the Atlantic, Gulf or Pacific coasts.

Since then, county monitoring has shown that the company has drastically reduced its DDT wastes.

Tests in April showed Montrose dumping about 800 pounds of DDT into sewers daily. Another 200 pounds came from unknown sources.

However, during the first week of October the total DDT entering county sewers was measured at

about 200 pounds; with Montrose's contribution apparently down to a little more than 2 pounds.

A. R. Wilcox, Montrose vice president for operations, said the discharge had been cut by avoiding spills and recycling water used in the manufacturing process. The company has applied for a federal grant to work on methods of chemically "degrading" DDT wastes.

The Environmental Defense Fund, a New York-based organization of scientists and other citizens, filed a similar suit last June against the Olin Corp. plant in Huntsville, Ala. EDF was joined by the National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation.

Three days later, Olin Corp. announced it was halting production of DDT and closing down its Huntsville facility.